

# NEGLECT IN POVERTY

This refers to neglect when families living in poverty.



## What could that look like?

Increased pressures on family life can lead to the risk of children experiencing neglect, but not all families living in poverty will be neglecting their children.

People experience poverty when they don't have enough money or resources to meet basic needs, like not being able to buy food, or to heat their home. If you're living in poverty, it can impact every part of your life and leave you feeling like you can't do things that other people take for granted (Trust for London, 2023)

When deciding if a child is experiencing neglect, consideration has to be given to acts of omission or commission by parents in meeting their child's basic needs, not situated in the context of poverty, debt and poor housing.

## What are the impacts on the child?

Living with poverty can bring anxiety, depression, family/ parental conflict, sleep deprivation, and much more. Not having nourishing food, engaging in healthy activities or living in decent housing has many impacts, including bringing stigma and feeling shame. Feelings of powerlessness and stress affecting mental and physical health directly. People living in poverty are more likely to develop unhealthy habits (smoking or other substance misuse) as coping mechanisms. They are more likely to report low levels of wellbeing and children specifically report that their self-confidence, friendships and family relationships are all affected. Children are more likely to have lower educational outcomes, and lower cognitive and social and emotional development than their peers, leading to reduced employment opportunities and increased health concerns.

## What action can be taken?

There are often misconceptions that poverty equates to neglect. There needs to be an understanding that resources and opportunities are shaped by the way the economy and society are structured and by political decisions about the distribution of resources. A lack of resources within a household will be compounded by a lack of resources in the local community.

Poverty is not just a lack of financial resources, but a social experience of negative interactions with society: Practitioners can either confront or re-enforce these feelings of stigma, through the language they use and the ways they work; people should not be blamed for living in poverty, it is not about them making bad decisions, there is a need to understand and acknowledge social injustice through skilled relationship-based practice.

Practitioners should recognise that those experiencing poverty understand it best and there is a need to work collaboratively to identify what is happening and needed.

Practitioners need to take the time to understand families' lived experiences, acknowledging the difficulties the family face and take the opportunity to reflect on the strengths they have developed in the levels of organisation and determination it takes to parent in extreme financial hardship.

Inequalities can sometimes mean that children from different places and circumstances, for example those with disabilities or from ethnic minorities, are often viewed with the lens of risk of harm, rather than need for help.

Family history and past periods of poverty can provide crucial insights into family functioning and the home environment. Identifying periods of financial hardship on chronologies can be helpful in providing context for understanding the cumulative impact of poverty.

There is a need to be trauma informed, as people living in poverty, over time and across generations, may well experience multiple disadvantages - fractured social networks, untreated physical and mental health concerns, substance misuse issues; a building-up of cumulative vulnerabilities and disadvantages which may well have lasting adverse effects.